

FCA REPORT

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Kansas, Missouri state funeral regulators evaluated: “A” grade for one, “D” for other

By Kathleen Kennedy, FCA-GKC volunteer

A report was recently conducted by the national Funeral Consumers Alliance and the Consumer Federation of America to evaluate state funeral service regulators and their helpfulness to consumers. Only seven of the 50 states (Hawaii doesn't have a state funeral regulator; the District of Columbia does) received an “A” grade, and the Kansas State Board of Mortuary Arts was one of those. The Missouri Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors received a grade of “D,” joining 32 other states receiving a D or F, indicating that information provided to consumers is poor or nonexistent.

According to the state laws that created them, the purpose of these regulatory boards is to protect the well-being of the public and consumers. This is done through governing credentials and licensure for funeral directors and personnel, and education of the public regarding their legal rights and options when planning for and purchasing funeral services and products.

For the study, two independent researchers examined the websites of these regulatory bodies. An “A” was earned if the website included *all* of the following:

- A prominent link to consumer-focused information. This should be “top-level” and intuitively labeled, not nested underneath a menu of choices unrelated to consumer information.
- An explanation of a consumer's basic rights under the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule. This rule,

See Regulators, page 2

Making, sharing, & recording your end-of-life decisions



In her 37 years as a therapist specializing in grief and loss, including both death and non-death loss, Therese McKechnie has learned some valuable life lessons.

For instance, she has seen families break apart over disputes about medical treatment decisions, funeral plans, and the distribution of assets. Sometimes those families remain splintered for generations.

The lesson, she said, “is how much better things are when decisions are thought through without a crisis and are clearly communicated with loved ones. It's a relief for you and a gift for them.”

The Overland Park licensed clinical social worker will share her experience as the keynote speaker at the annual program of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 5. It will be live streamed to those who register on the FCA-GKC website, www.funeralskc.org. In-person attendance will also be available (*masks required*), at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 4501 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64111.

Two hours of continuing education credits will be provided to social workers, licensed professional counselors, physicians, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses. FCA-GKC will charge a modest fee of \$25 for the event to offset the expenses of the program.

McKechnie was moved to place her own affairs in order five years ago before departing for Spain to walk the 500-mile Camino de Santiago, a spiritual pilgrimage ending at Santiago de Compostela. If something should happen to her, she wanted her children to know what to do. She finished the walk and returned in good health. However, the exercise inspired her to complete a workbook titled “The Last Chapter: Documenting Your Pre- and Post-Death Decisions.” The workbook is designed to help people think through and document their decisions about their end of life and after death, and to keep them in one accessible place.

In her address, titled “Our Last Chapter: Making End-of-Life Decisions Before It's Too Late,” McKechnie will highlight three broad stages in the process: deciding, documenting, and discussing:

See Annual, page 3

Regulators, from page 1

often mirrored by the state's own requirements, gives consumers the right to choose services à la carte, receive price quotes by phone, and receive a printed, itemized price list at a funeral home.

- An explanation of a consumer's rights when buying a prepaid funeral. This should include an explanation of how much a consumer will be refunded if the contract is cancelled before death or if the prepaid money is assigned to a new funeral home at the customer's request.

- Other information about how consumers can optimize their purchase of funeral services, including links to the FTC website or publications about shopping for funeral services.

- A prominent link for filing a complaint.

- The ability to see whether a funeral home has been subject to disciplinary action by the regulatory body.

When asked how Kansas managed such a high grade, J.W. Carey, executive secretary of the Kansas State Board of Mortuary Arts, said he could not take credit because he is new to the position and was not part of the website's management.

A call to the Missouri Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors was not returned. More evaluation of these state boards is in the works. □

Preplan, but don't prepay

Funeral homes like to see families arriving ahead of time to plan funerals, and FCA does, too. But the funeral home will try to sell a prepaid plan, and we advise against it. Preplan, we say, but don't prepay.

We suggest opening a bank or credit union savings account jointly with a trusted friend or relative who knows your wishes. □

COVID-19 government funeral aid: A critical look

Editor's note: This essay is from a white paper prepared by the National Funeral Consumers Alliance, with the goal of educating Congress and the public in the hope of improving future policy making.

As a result of a \$50 billion appropriation in the American Rescue Plan, up to \$9,000 is available to families for funeral expenses following a death caused by COVID-19.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance does not take a policy position on whether the government should reimburse residents for funerals. But the FCA is concerned that consumers and policy makers should understand the options available to all Americans to control funeral costs.

Unintended consequences?

The FCA national headquarters and its local organizations receive thousands of inquiries from financially strapped consumers every year. The majority have experienced a death in the family, and many cannot come up with \$800 to \$1,500 to pay for the most basic cremation. But because most deaths do not come from COVID-19, the family qualifies for no federal assistance. There is no federal program to help low-income residents with funeral expenses.

Residents participating in the American Rescue Plan program, however, may be led or pressured to buy a full \$9,000 funeral package—at a cost far above what many, if not most, families can afford.

The “average” or “minimum” cost of a funeral varies by region and by the options one adds to basic services. The Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule gives consumers the legal right to choose as many or as few optional services from funeral homes as that family desires and can afford. The rule also mandates that nearly all American funeral homes offer simple, non-ceremonial, less-expensive options such as direct burial or direct cremation.

Cost-comparison surveys by FCA advocates show that most Americans can make basic cremation or burial arrangements for as little as \$1,000 to \$3,000. The COVID-19 government benefit program, however, uses the average cost for an elaborate, all-options-included funeral and treats this all-inclusive funeral as a “minimum.” *It is not.*

None of the ceremonial options included in a full-service ceremonial funeral are required purchases. In almost every case, consumers have a legal right to decline costly services such as embalming, rental of the facility for public display of the body, ceremonial and ornamented casket, rental of facility and staff to conduct a funeral, and graveside ceremony, hearse, and flowers.

The benefit program creates incentives with far-reaching consequences:

- It promises reimbursement for COVID-19 funeral expenses that have yet to occur because the deaths have not yet occurred.
- It incentivizes families to spend up to the \$9,000 limit. There is no natural spending brake built in; maximum spending is encouraged.
- It creates an incentive for families to press doctors and medical examiners to record that the death was from COVID-19. This will likely have negative consequences on the treasury, and may compromise the accuracy of death diagnoses and our statistical records.

The FCA also points out that the program is not related to recipient income. The \$9,000 reimbursement is available to a poor family and a rich

See Critical, page 3

Green, from back page

Crews worked in the end-of-life field for many years, starting as a musician who brought music to the bedside of dying people in nursing homes and hospice, before going back to school to learn more about end-of-life traditions.

"I just started noticing how out of balance our burial practices were and how we had become spectators at one of the most important transitions that we, as family members and communities, experience," Crews said. "As soon as our person dies, we have their body removed from us. They are taken care of by strangers in a \$20 billion-a-year industry. The people at the cemetery do all the burying, and we've kind of lost touch with rituals around caring for our dead."

Now, she's a death educator and a home funeral guide who teaches families how to care for their own loved ones at home after they've died.

Other cemeteries in Kansas offer green burial services, in addition to traditional services, such as Oak Hill Cemetery in Lawrence, Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, Mount Muncie in Lansing, Kan., and Elmwood Cemetery in Kansas City, Mo.

Green burial cost

In 2019, the national median cost of an adult burial and funeral was more than \$9,000 and a cremation and funeral was more than \$5,000, according to the National Funeral Directors Association.

"For a lot of people, a \$10,000 funeral is not something they can afford," said Shafer. "The green burial is a way for the body to be recycled more quickly. ... The whole point is to minimize the barrier between the body and the soil so that the body can return to its natural state and its atoms and molecules can be reused and recycled." □



A green burial in Elmwood Cemetery

Annual, from page 1

Deciding: What you want and don't want. Do you want to be resuscitated if there is no hope of survival? Would you prefer cremation, a church service, a burial?

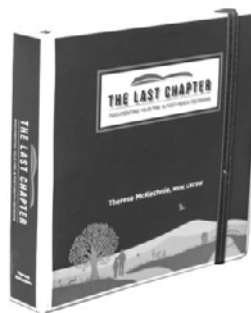
Documenting: Write down your decisions. She suggests letters to your family and possibly your physician, sharing your thoughts, beliefs, and wishes. This stage also includes establishing durable power of attorney for health care and financial decisions.

Discussing: Share your decisions with those who will act on your behalf when you cannot act on your own.

Although it is true that we live in a death-denying society, McKechnie has studied a promising innovation in La Crosse, Wis., that is spreading to other cities. In her talk, she will explain the Respecting Choices program, where health-care providers help their patients fill out advance directives and encourage discussing them with loved ones.

"A very high percentage of patients who use [La Crosse's] medical system have completed the documents," she said.

In addition to her clinical work, McKechnie is an adjunct instructor at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, teaching about grief and loss to master's-degree students. She also is a frequent workshop and seminar presenter for professional audiences and the public. □



Critical, from page 2

family alike. What public good is served by offering such a generous sum of taxpayer revenue to families who can afford to pay for their desired choices?

Every death that occurs in a family is a sad event, regardless of the cause of that death. This program reimburses only families who have experienced a death because of COVID-19. While we recognize the grief that such deaths bring to our fellow citizens, it's noteworthy that:

- The program funds will be subsidized by all taxpayers, but the majority of those who experience a death will have no access to these funds.
- Had this program been designed to assist families with basic funeral arrangements, this \$50 billion could have helped many more American families. It could have helped many more who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and who also experienced a death, even if that death was not attributable to COVID-19.
- In summary: At the program's \$9,000 increments, as designed, it may help 5,550,000 households with top-of-the-line funerals. In \$3,000 increments, it could help 16,660,000 households with basic funeral costs. In \$1,500 increments, it could help 33,330,000 households with simple cremation, which is available in most U.S. markets. □

The big picture

By Kate Sargent
FCA-GKC President



Hello, friend. Here we are, meeting again in the newsletter “home” of our 60-year-old organization. We have a moment together as you read, and I invite you to join us in the kind of reflection that is fitting for all big anniversaries:

What was our organization’s purpose in the beginning and through the years? Is it still the same? How did our predecessors do, and are we honoring their passion and commitment with our own? How are *we* doing, with our time and our gifts? Will we know if we are finished? Should there be a 61st year?

Which phrase is the right fit this special year: “60 years and _____

- A) Going strong?
- B) Changing strategies?
- C) Phasing out?

The language we select has everything to do with whether we think this remarkable, all-volunteer organization—which never had its own meeting space or a predictable funding source, in which no one got paid, and which shared information about a topic that many Americans would rather avoid considering—has completely achieved the mission laid out for it all those years ago.

Let’s first decide the questions:

Do individuals and families still need information and strategies to carry them through the unique decisions forced by death, to know how to comfort and understand themselves and one another in crisis, and to protect the solvency of their future by choosing costs wisely?

Now, some answers:

Even in these days when a Google search yields a bewildering amount of information, not all people know what to do with the information or have the emotional capacity to adapt it to their needs in a crisis. Guidance and impartial support are still vital. Planning still needs to be promoted and supported. Our annual program keynote speaker this year, Therese McKechnie, has said that the damage to an unprepared family can be so traumatic as to have generational repercussions.

May we settle on “A” and “B”? Looks like there will be a 61st year! Maybe even more. Please be a part of it with us; we could sure use the help.

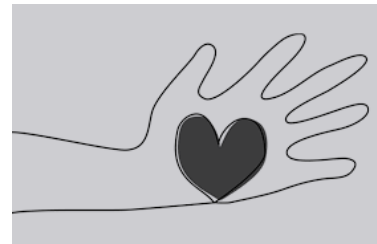
Honestly, I wish we really *were* sitting together to talk about FCA-GKC’s future. Even so, there are two ways for you to have genuine influence on our goal of easing bereavement through information and preventing funeral poverty:

Saluting our donors

We have *so much gratitude* to the following, who contributed a total of \$1,687 to our support from April through September. These donations are heaven sent because the printing and mailing of this newsletter and the production of our annual program on Nov. 5 will require most of those funds. Donations are the sole support for this all-volunteer consumer organization. Thank you!

The FCA-GKC Board of Directors

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1) **Financially support this necessary work.**

Stand with our bereaved neighbors by helping to fund the collection and distribution of the *only* comparison of funeral prices charged by all 113 providers in the metropolitan area. Use PayPal on our website, www.funeralskc.org, or send a check to FCA-GKC, PO Box 7021, Kansas City, MO 64113.

2) **Join us!** Email us, fca.gkc@gmail.com, or leave a phone message, 816-561-6322. We will return the call. Come be part of our talented, persistent, committed volunteers.

And be sure to read articles related to our 60-year history on pages 5, 6, and 7. □

60 years of education & advocacy! FCA-GKC is celebrating

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member

Sixty years ago last month, several members of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church united over their concern that some area funeral homes were “over-selling” their products and services to financially vulnerable families struggling with loss. They founded the Greater Kansas City Memorial Society, a consumer protection agency now known as the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City.

While there are many fine local funeral operators, some still engage in questionable practices. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the industry’s resistance to natural burial, also known as green burial. That’s the way our ancestors were buried before the 1900s, without embalming or even funeral homes. Families placed their loved ones’ bodies in wooden boxes or shrouds and buried them three or four feet deep.

With a natural burial there are no steel caskets. No concrete vaults or grave liners. No packing the earth on top so mowing equipment can be driven over. Instead, mounds are left on graves to settle with the weather and bodies decompose naturally to become rich “earth-to-earth” compost. But for 10 years, the FCA-GKC could not find a single local public cemetery that allowed natural burial. Jewish and Muslim cemeteries do, but they are not available to the public.

“There’s no demand for natural burial,” we were told by funeral providers and cemeteries.

Then, in 2015, the FCA-GKC found the historic one-acre Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village, with an aging sexton who was ready to transfer his responsibilities. Highland Cemetery allows natural burial. FCA-GKC board members and other local residents formed a non-profit corporation that assumed cemetery management. At that time it had 150 unsold graves. Four years later, all had been sold – mostly to families seeking natural burial. Don’t tell us there’s no demand.

Last year the trustees of the historic Elmwood Cemetery relaxed its policy of requiring burial vaults and now allow natural burial. Cemeteries in Lawrence, Lansing, Salina, and Columbia also offer it, but to our knowledge Elmwood is the only other one in this metro area.

The FCA-GKC’s mission is to provide information and education about options such as natural burial, and to publish price lists for all 113 area funeral homes. The Federal Trade Commission’s Funeral Rule mandates that funeral homes give their standardized price lists to anyone who asks in person, but the FCA-GKC does the time-intensive work of gathering prices so individual consumers don’t have to.

The average price for a standard funeral here (including embalming, a visitation, and a service, but not

including a casket or cemetery costs) is almost \$6,000, but funeral homes charge from \$3,500 to \$9,100 for the same services. For a direct cremation (no embalming, visitation, or service), the average price is \$1,763, ranging from \$675 to \$3,590. These are *huge* price ranges. Whether grieving loved ones are unemployed, underemployed, or gainfully employed, it pays to know the difference.



Steve Nicely

The choice of cremation, growing in popularity, now functions as a counter force against high funeral prices. Cremation furnaces here currently claim about 55 percent of our dead bodies. Cremation is economical and convenient. You can ship the ashes in the mail, save them for a memorial service later, bury them, scatter them, entomb them. But one thing cremation is *not* environmentally sound. Piped up the chimney into the atmosphere are all of the body’s carbons and enough burned fossil fuel to drive an automobile 500 miles. Natural burial is by far the most ecological choice.

Here is something even more fundamental we’ve gleaned from our years of funeral consumerism: Ours is a death-denying culture. We have become uncomfortable around the subject of death, or planning for it, or being present for it. And many of us try to distance ourselves further with the caskets and vaults that can cause financial stress for survivors. Numerous choices exist now. Many of them are natural, inexpensive, and ecologically sound.

The FCA-GKC exists to let you know about those choices. The organization has no membership fees. Price lists are available for free at funeralskc.org. The organization depends entirely on donations and the work of dedicated volunteers.

Hospital and hospice social workers are among the most active professionals in giving families the knowledge they need to make wise choices.

Steve Nicely is a 15-year board member and past president of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City and a retired Kansas City Star journalist. This essay previously ran in the Star.

FCA's role in funeral transparency

By the time Dr. Harold Buschman, Dr. John McLeod, and Lowell L. Smithson filed incorporation papers for the Greater Kansas City Memorial Society in 1961, numerous similar memorial societies had been formed in other cities and more would emerge afterward. What motivated these people? What were the funeral industry offences these Kansas City residents sought to remedy?

Jim Grebe, who co-authored a history of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, reported the motives of Rev. Ray Bragg, church minister at the time and one of the memorial society's founding board members. Bragg said the society was designed to "combat the ever-increasing commercialism attached to many funeral arrangements."

Memorial society members across the country complained to the Federal Trade Commission about funeral practices, according to a history of the movement by the national Funeral Consumers Alliance. Could the average person get accurate prices upon request? How many funeral homes routinely embalmed and charged for it without asking permission? What if the family wanted a modest burial without the trimmings? Could they select services à la carte?

What the FTC found was damning, the history states. A 500-page staff report released in 1978 confirmed practices that the memorial societies had been reporting for decades: secrecy about prices, mandatory all-inclusive packaged funerals, blatant lying about nonexistent legal requirements. In response, the FTC proposed a regulation, or rule, that would require funeral homes to share prices by phone and in writing on a standardized price list, allow consumers to pick services item by item, and refrain from misrepresenting the law.

The National Funeral Directors Association fought the proposal but lost in court. The FTC Funeral Rule went into effect in 1984. But with no such regulation in effect in 1961, how could the GKC Memorial Society assist its members? It could negotiate discounted prices and consumer-friendly services with a few reputable funeral homes on behalf of its members.

Today those memorial societies have been renamed as chapters of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, headquartered in Vermont. And today the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City does *not* negotiate deals with funeral homes. Instead, it provides education and free information, including the current prices charged by all funeral providers in the metro area, available at www.funeralskc.org.

FCA-GKC enjoys a good relationship with most area funeral directors, who cooperate with us every two years when we update the price lists. But some apparently think it's none of our business what they charge. That's when our volunteers visit them and request their general price lists. The FTC Funeral Rule *requires* compliance. □

Denial as an obstacle

FCA-GKC has been active in the Kansas City metropolitan area for 60 years! Why, then, do so few people seem to know about it? We allude to the answer in this newsletter's cover article about our annual program: It is true that we live in a death-denying society.

Two longtime FCA-GKC board members discussed the problem recently. We'll call them "FCA One" and "FCA Two." Their conversation went like this:

FCA One: "I am amazed at how many of the doctors and nurses I meet don't know about the Funeral Consumers Alliance. They are the ones who should know and need to know."

FCA Two: Nurses and doctors are so focused on saving people, they don't want to hear about death."

One: "It's the same with the general public. They don't want to hear about it, either. Overcoming the public reluctance to think about death or plan for it has been our biggest obstacle over the years."

Two: "It's our culture. Avoiding death is winning. You have to be young. Other cultures are less circumspect about death."

One: "Thank God for social workers. They know about us and pass on our information to their clients. We've had many social workers on our board over the years."

Two: "Yes, we have. Thank God for them."

As someone who does know about our organization, and who is willing to face death, *you* can provide a vastly important service by raising the topic with family and friends, and directing people to the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City. Thank you! □

Let us help educate your members

Are you part of an organization that would benefit from an unbiased presentation about important practical aspects of funeral planning and myths/facts about funeral and burial practices?

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City has speakers who are eager to share and educate. Call us at 816-561-6322 or email us at fca.gkc@gmail.com. We'll line you up with one of our members for a visit—at no charge, of course.

We look forward to meeting and interacting with you!

Join us!

We're always looking for people interested in helping with our work. Lots of volunteer opportunities are available. Call 816-561-6322 email fca.gkc@gmail.com to help.





Salute to former president Bev McGill



FCA-GKC board members since 2005

Rev. Stuart Whitney, president	20??-06
Pam Thomas, PhD	2005-19
Carole Allen, RN	2005-09
Phyllis Brooks	2005-06
Rev. Paul Budd	2005-07
Glen Crowther	2005-07
Ruth Crowther	2005-07
Hope Grunt	2005-11
Bev McGill	2005-11 (pres. 2006-11)
R. Diane Hall	2005-09
Marj Swomley	2005-09
Nancy Trout	2005-08
Mary Bradley	2006-11
Steve Nicely	2006-→ (pres. 2011-13)
Nancy Petersen	2007-20
Maxine Williams	2007-08
Rev. Jennie Malewski	2007-08
Rev. Tom Bailey	2008-11
Margaret Howieson	2008-11
Jim Fitzpatrick	2010-16
Sally King	2010-15 (pres. 2013-14)
Frank Cockrell	2011-19 (pres. 2017-19)
Lyle VanVleet	2011-18
Linda Johnson	2011-13
Sue Fine	2011-12
Marci Michnick	2011-16
Nancy Jobe	2013-17 (pres. 2014-17)
Lynn Anderson	2015-18
Mike Schalinsky	2015-16
Kate Sargent	2016-→ (pres. 2020-→)
David Johnson	2017-→
Ginny Farney	2017-20 (pres. 2019-20)
Kathleen Foster	2018-20
Jacque Amweg	2018-→
Jon Shafer	2020-→
Angelica Martinez	2020-→
Diane Etzel-Wise	2020-→

After the death in 2006 of the Rev. Stuart Whitney, FCA-GKC's long-time president, the organization flirted with its own death. That was the year in which then-77-year-old Bev McGill took over as president.

"The board was down to three of us," said McGill, who turned 92 in September. "It was terrible."

To revive the organization, the Lenexa mother of 11 drew on her years of experience as an activist. She had taught breast-feeding education during an era when most mothers bottle fed their babies. She had worked for nursing home reform with Kansas Advocates for Better Care. Finally, she turned to funeral consumerism.

It prompted her RN daughter, Tina, to comment, "First babies, then old people, now dead people. What's next, mother?" Tina now teaches breast feeding at AdventHealth Shawnee Mission, formerly Shawnee Mission Medical Center.

The sudden death in 1952 of her 3-month-old daughter, Mary Kathryn, had exposed the McGills to the funeral industry for the first time in Minneapolis, Minn. Later, after the family moved to the Kansas City area, Bev and her husband, Ron, met resistance at a Minneapolis cemetery when they asked to move the baby's remains to Resurrection Cemetery in Lenexa.

"They gave me a terrible run-around," she said. "I made many calls. Finally they wouldn't even talk to me at the cemetery."

A call to the Minnesota Board of Mortuary Science melted the resistance. The baby's remains were disinterred and brought to Lenexa in the van of one of McGill's sisters. Bev lives about a block away from the cemetery here and visits Mary Kathryn's grave often.

FCA's mission of educating the public is a valuable public service, McGill says. □



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Angelica Martinez
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Cemetery on prairie dedicated to green burial

By Sarah Spicer, The Wichita Eagle

Editor's note: This article has been slightly modified and is run with permission from the Wichita Eagle.

For some of us, visiting a family member's grave in a cemetery can be an almost mathematical process. Every memorial day, it's two rows down, three over to find my grandfather and leave plastic flowers to memorialize his service in the U.S. Merchant Marines in World War II. Imagine instead, a prairie field, filled with native grasses and trees, where men with binoculars sit on benches and watch birds. Children toddle after their parents on nearby hiking trails that wind in and out of the field, and small patches of wildflowers grow near stones that stand as decorated grave markers.

This is the future, or rather a possible return to the past that some, like Sarah Crews, imagine with a revolution called "green burials," but it is actually a movement back to the more natural form of burials that have existed since humans first walked the earth.

Each year in our cemeteries, the U.S. buries an estimated 800,000 gallons of formaldehyde-based embalming fluid, 2.3 billion tons of concrete, 4 million acres of forest worth of wood and 115 million tons of steel. Additionally, an estimated 360,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide are released into the air from cremations. These CO2 emissions, which contribute to climate change, could have been worsened this year as places like Los Angeles had to lift their cremation limits to deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sarah Crews, the founder, and director of Heart Land Prairie Cemetery in central Kansas, represents a movement that has reached across the nation as environmental concerns with climate change become more present in the national psyche.

"To think about how we want our bodies, whether we want our bodies to contribute

to life on the planet after death or contribute to more pollution on the planet is a worthy consideration," Crews said.

What is a green burial?

While requirements vary, most green burials require a biodegradable container, such as a cardboard box, a casket made out of pine or banana leaves, or a cloth shroud to encase the dead. The body is not embalmed and no outer burial container (vault) is used. Refrigeration is used to preserve the body until burial.

"I just think it's better to be more natural, to allow our bodies to recycle as they will eventually and I personally don't see any reason to try to slow that process down. It's going to happen," said Jon Shafer, a board member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City. "It's honoring the Earth as well as the people, and some people have strong environmental concerns. This is a way for them to be buried that is consistent with that."

Unlike most traditional burials, families are often allowed to participate in the burial process, such as digging the grave or lowering the dead into the ground.

"Grief isn't a stagnant thing. It needs expression, and I think that physical activity can really help move our grief through our bodies and be a comfort," Crews said.

Heart Land Prairie Cemetery, located near Niles, about 15 miles northeast of Salina, is the first and only Kansas cemetery entirely dedicated to green burial, Crews said. The 13.5-acre cemetery has trails and benches for visitors, hikers, and bird watchers to use.



Sarah Spicer